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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 004609

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/19/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: KASYANOV ON OPPOSITION PROSPECTS; PUTIN'S PLANS

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reason: 1.4 (d).

Summary  
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11. (C) A relaxed, self confident ex-Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov told Ambassador September 18 that:

-- the appointment of 66-year old Viktor Zubkov as Prime Minister meant that President Putin was determined to leave office in 2008, but remained undecided about the succession;

-- if Zubkov became President, the chances were greater that Putin would return to power before 2012;

-- Putin had appointed "his personal friend," Zubkov, in part in order to reduce the influence that Presidential Administration Head Igor Sechin exercised through former Prime Minister Fradkov;

-- if First Deputy Prime Minister Sergey Ivanov became President, an early Putin return to the presidency was excluded (at least through 2012);

-- four parties would be in the new Duma: United Russia, Just Russia, the Communist Party, and LDPR;

-- Putin's succession master plan could become clear as early as the President's October 7 55th birthday;

-- Kasyanov would be allowed to register and run for President only if the Kremlin were confident it could control the outcome. Allowing Kasyanov into the second round of the elections was "dangerous," as it would energize an otherwise dispirited electorate. End summary.

Succession Scenarios  
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12. (C) In their September 18 meeting, ex-Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov told Ambassador that the appointment of Viktor Zubkov as Prime Minister meant that President Putin had decided firmly to leave office in 2008, but had not yet decided on a succession scenario. The elevation of Zubkov to President, if it occurred, would increase the chances that Putin would return before 2012, when his successor's term would expire. If First Deputy Prime Minister Sergey Ivanov were tapped for the presidency, an early Putin return would not take place (at least not before 2012).

13. (C) Kasyanov thought that Putin had decided to bring Zubkov into play relatively recently. He claimed that Zubkov had been planning to retire when he reached the mandatory age of 66 for government employees (Zubkov's birthday was September 15).

14. (C) Putin had appointed Zubkov, his "personal friend," in

party to reduce the influence Presidential Administration Head Igor Sechin wielded in Kremlin politics via Prime Minister Fradkov. It was not clear what the President's next step would be, but he could show his hand as early as his October 7 birthday, which would provide the perfect occasion for a dramatic announcement. In Kasyanov's view, if Putin were going to make Ivanov president, he would have to make it known soon, in order to solidify support.

#### Kasyanov's Campaign

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¶5. (C) Kasyanov thought that the continued fragmentation of the opposition had increased the Kremlin's confidence so much that it might allow him to be registered and run for President. His Popular Democratic Union would meet after the Duma elections to decide if he should throw his hat into the ring. If it appeared at that time that Zubkov would be tapped for the presidency then, Kasyanov calculated, his odds of success, if allowed to compete, would improve. A one-year Zubkov presidency, Kasyanov thought, was the most dangerous for Putin.

¶6. (C) Kasyanov shrugged off Kremlin-directed efforts by the youth group "Nashi" to disrupt his campaign. Thirty Nashi members followed him everywhere, even in Moscow, but they did not appear to be getting information from the FSB about his movements, which handicapped their efforts.

#### The Fragmented Opposition

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¶7. (C) It appeared likely to Kasyanov that the opposition would remain fragmented. Yabloko party Chairman Grigoriy Yavlinskiy seemed to have won the Kremlin's approval to run a

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campaign, and was getting air time on central television. Kasyanov guessed that Yabloko's presence on national television was calibrated in part to create the appearance of a hotly-contested election, but that Yabloko would encounter more obstacles as it attempted to campaign in the regions.

¶8. (C) If a "miracle" occurred, Yabloko could win seven percent. It was more likely, Kasyanov believed, that it would win three percent, which would entitle it to Federal financing, and allow Yabloko to survive into the next election cycle.

¶9. (C) The Union of Right Forces (SPS), in Kasyanov's view, was equally unlikely to win seats in the Duma. SPS patron Anatoliy Chubais had good relations with the Kremlin, but he would not get its permission to spend the USD 200 million from RAO UES coffers that Kasyanov estimated was necessary for SPS to win Duma representation.

¶10. (C) Kasyanov joined other political observers here in predicting that independent Duma Deputy Vladimir Ryzhkov would not be offered a slot on the SPS party list. Ryzhkov "has been a Duma deputy since he was 26, and knows nothing else; he is very depressed." Kasyanov planned to offer Ryzhkov a place in his organization after the SPS conference on September 21.

¶11. (C) Kasyanov had unsuccessfully urged SPS and Yabloko not to legitimate the political process by participating in the elections. He differed with Other Russia, as well. Other Russia leader Garry Kasparov wanted to be his organization's candidate for President. Kasparov, Kasyanov said tactfully, was a "potential friend" and some of Other Russia's members, especially from Eduard Limonov's National Bolshevik Party, were helping him in the regions.

#### Comment

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¶12. (C) Kasyanov --no stranger to "take no prisoner" Kremlin politics-- appeared, if anything, energized by the obstacles he faces as he pursues his long-shot run at the presidency. It is clear that he sees the surprise selection of Zubkov as keeping not only Putin's, but his own, options alive. Kasyanov evidently hopes that the instability created by a weak potential successor, or Kremlin complaisance fostered by a fractured opposition, will somehow create the perfect storm he needs to make a serious run at the presidency.  
Burns